

December 13, 2009

Hello Jan Vennix

Thanks for nice letter

I really appreciate the package you sent me – the Christmas card I had not seen before – even though I was “there”. Actually I spent most of my almost 2 years living in rather isolated from UNEG El Arish (the RCAF considered themselves independent from Rafah and Gaza) and Beirut where my only contact was UN radio operator and the almost daily sched flight from El Arish Gaza. My real boss for Movement Control was in Gaza – a Brazilian Colonel – and in 10 months in Beirut I heard from him twice – once to buy him some grapes in Beirut for him and the other to make sure the Brazilian Minister of Defence seat was dusted from trip from Beirut to Gaza – on a Caribou??

By now you will have seen what I have been busy trying to coordinate – a watering hole for all the people who were in the area – I am calling it www.115ATU.ca but my “agenda” is to include Rafah/Gaza/ Sharm – all UNEF areas and then expand to Yemen/Congo -but I want to start off with a first step –El Arish. So please contribute to “Reminiscences part”!

It was not easy to keep your sanity there – for two reasons .First you were really “doing nothing constructive “ you found out after a while .and secondly the culture was completely different – the Middle East/Arab/Moslem culture we had not been at all trained for. We were a product of the 60s – Woodstock – idealism – Kennedy Peace Corps – we could change the world. Our fathers had fought WW 2 and our generation would “bring peace” .

Enough for now

Gord

Hello Gord
2009

9 December

That snail mail went faster than I would have thought. You can keep the cards for your ATU UNEF archives and I don't need anything in return. Just keep me posted now and then with your ATU research snippets. Or any new ATU RCAF caribou or otter pics.

Living in Beirut amongst the locals would have given you a fascinating insider's look and comparison between the Lebanese, Egyptians and Palestinians of the day. And the tremendous contrast between Beirut, the Paris of the Middle East and El Arish the settlement in the dustbowl of the Sinai.

At the time, to keep his sanity, Dad did quite a bit of humanitarian work. Like in cases where UNWRA could not get through the red tape. He got a Palestinian kid to Haddasah hospital for an operation to save his eyesight. Even though the kid lived in Jerusalem, as the crow flies, quite close to the Hospital it was on the wrong side of the green line. It is interesting that many people know about the divided Berlin but not about the divided Jerusalem or Nicosia for that matter. Anyway the child's operation did break down the barriers between quite a few Arab families and our family and I still love hummus and falafel to this very day. Dad was not too keen on the sheep eyes, but had to please the hosts now and then. It was far harder to break the ice and get closer to the Israeli families when we lived in Tel Aviv.

For a while we lived also in El Azaria (Bethany, just outside J'lem, where Lazarus rolled up his mattress and went walkabout) It was great fun watching the local kids every day after school approaching the tourists visiting Lazarus's chapel and selling them rosemary beads and wooden trinkets, all blessed by the Arch bishop (your choice of denomination) of Jerusalem and all made from olive trees from the Garden of Gethsemane. They must have replanted that olive grove thousands of times for a continual supply of wood. I can still hear Mum bargaining at the vegetable stalls. Edish for the tomatoes. Yella, mafish kwajish.

Ghana was still quite a mess in the late 70's when I did several trips with the ships to West coast countries of Africa. Not as bad as countries like Nigeria, but Ghana was overrun with economic refugees from Nigeria in those days and this was adding to its woes. I have to smile when the newspaper reports about modern occurrence of ship pirates in Somalia and the Indian Ocean. That was very common in Nigerian waters in the 70's and 80's. We used to

get a \$9 danger allowance a day for being in those waters. What a joke. The ex French African colonies in those days like Ivory Coast seemed in a bit less of a mess, as when the French pulled out, they did it gradually, leaving top key French administrators in the departments, till they trained the locals to take over.

Regards
Jan